

Modern Native Orientalism: Islam phobia or Lack of Scholarly Credentials?

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Abstract:

Islam has been discussed and criticized in the West by the name of Orientalism and this practice is in vogue in the modern enlightened age. While Orientalism remains to be an important chapter in the history of Islam and the West, new modes of approaching Islam, ranging from dialogue and critical understanding to confrontation and rejection, continue to make their appearances in various forms. Recently the West has started sponsoring some Muslims and ex-Muslims to criticize Islam besides the Orientalists. These so-called Muslims have been frequently appearing in the arenas of criticism for last few years. We may call these Muslims or ex-Muslims as 'native Orientalists.'

Orientalism and Native Orientalism: A Revaluation

In the modern age, the Western critical study of Islam may be categorized in the following two types:

1. Orientalism
2. Native Orientalism

It is pertinent to discuss here briefly the term Orientalism, its definition and purposes in modern scenario to comprehend the background and targets of Native Orientalism.

Orientalism in Modern Scenario

According to Oxford English Dictionary the term *Orientalism* is used for the subject and the works of the Orientalists, scholars versed in the cultures, histories, languages and societies of Asia or the Orient, since the 18th century when the tradition was born.¹

Muslims use the term 'Orientalist' generally to refer any scholar who lives in the West and studies Islam apart from his or her objectives and motives behind the study. However, the phenomenon of Orientalism is much more than an academic pursuit.

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In modern scenario, an Arab Christian, Edward Said (d.2003), a renowned scholar and the author of several books has given a new dimension to the meanings of the term Orientalism in his superb work titled 'Orientalism'². He uses the term to describe a pervasive Western tradition, both academic and artistic, of hostile and deprecatory views of the East, shaped by the attitudes of European Imperialism in the 18th and 19th centuries³. Said's concept of Orientalism carries much weight and is considered the most suitable and appropriate depiction of Orientalism as far as its background, methodologies, goals and objectives are concerned. There is no doubt that in recent times he is considered as an authority on the subject of Orientalism.

Edward Said precedes Orientalism as multidimensional in the introduction of his book *Orientalism* keeping in view its various aspects and influences:

- Unlike the Americans, the French and the Britishless so the Germans, Russians, Spanish, Portuguese, Italians, and Swiss _have had a long tradition of what I shall be calling *Orientalism*, a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience.⁴
- Orientalism a style of thought based upon an ontolo-gical and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occiden'.⁵
- in short Orientalism as a Western style for dominat-ing, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.⁶

Objectives of Orientalism: Misinformation About Islam

Edward Said, in his scholarly work *Orientalism* scrutinized Western scholarship of the "Orient," particularly of the Arab Islamic world and argued that premature scholarship by Westerners in that region was prejudiced and estimated a false and stereotyped apparition of 'otherness'⁷ on Islamic world that made possible and maintained Western colonial policy.

Moving on to a more detailed look at the Western distorted view of Islam, in general, & Orientalism in particular . . Edward Said precisely referred to Orientalism a "cultural enterprise"⁸. This is definitely a no twist. Without a doubt, the basics of Orientalism are in the saying "know thy enemy".⁹ The Christian nations of Europe instrumented their academic and missionary capital in order to colonize and triumph over other nations to occupy their resources. Thus the Orientalists performed their task of weakening enemy very well as Edward Said states:

"With regard to Islam and Islamic territories, for example, Britain felt that it had legitimate interests, as a Christian power, to safeguard. A complex apparatus for tending these interests developed. Such early organizations as the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (1698) and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (1701) were succeeded and later abetted by the Baptist Missionary Society (1792), the Church Missionary Society (1799), the British & Foreign Bible Society (1804), the London Society for Promoting Christianity Among the Jews (1808). These missions "openly" joined the expansion of Europe"¹⁰.

The deformations and lies about Islam during the dark ages in Europe had not been limited to a small number of Orientalists as Edward Said points out:

"This rigorous Christian picture of Islam was intensified in innumerable ways, including during the Middle Ages and early Renaissance a large variety of poetry, learned controversy, and popular superstition. By this time the Near Orient had been all but incorporated in the common world picture of Latin Christianity as in the *Chanson de Roland* the worship of Saracens is portrayed as embracing Mahomet and Apollo. By the middle of the 15th century, as R.W. Southern has brilliantly shown, it became apparent to serious European thinkers "that something would have to be done about Islam," which had turned the situation around somewhat by

Itself arriving militarily in Eastern Europe”¹¹.

The Orientalists seem least concerned with the objective question. What is Islam? Or what do Islamic Sources say about Islam? Their approach is not as it should normally be, to first take Islam as it defines itself, and only then, if necessary, proceed to formulate their criticism or objections to Islam.

Their objective on the contrary, is to try to persuade Muslims to take Islam in the way they have decided to understand or misunderstand Islam. Thus if colonialism was about occupying other people's land, resources and territory, Orientalism is about occupying their faith, history and identity. In other words, Muslims should be required to understand Islam in accordance with their misunderstanding of Islam.¹²

In the present age the prejudice and hostility against Islam is at climax and the West seems to be up and running to annihilate Islam from all over the globe. The Crusades with missiles and pens have been waged against the Muslims to destroy their territories and their faith at the same time. This practice is causing a hatred and revulsion against the West in a great extent among the Muslims. The worst aspect of the scenario is that the hostility toward Islam is by no means seemed to have an end as Edward Said examines the fact:

...the illegal and unsanctioned imperial invasion and occupation of Iraq by Britain and United States proceeds with a prospect of physical ravagement, political unrest and more invasions that is truly awful to contemplate. This is all part of what is supposed to be clash of civilizations, unending, implacable and irremediable. Nevertheless, I think not.¹³

West's war has brought a lot of new hazards for the Muslims all over the world. Thousands of Muslims have been killed in wars imposed on Iraq and Afghanistan. Now the war is carried to Pakistan where death rate is not low. The war is being fought by the West not only by the weapons but also with the ideas as the term 'terrorism' has been specified for the Muslim ideology of

Jihād. The mission is not only to change the boundaries of Muslim territories but also to mould their ideas and for latter purpose West must win the heart and minds of Muslims. Hence, the West is employyng each and every strategy to occupy the resources, territory, faith, history and identity of an 'old enemy', Islam. Don't bother about the instruments and techniques, it may be colonialism, imperialism, Orientalism or other else, native Orientalism.

Native Orientalism

In shade of the spar between Islam and the West, many individuals with Muslim background are criticizing Islam for their personal agendas of recognition, reputation, affluence and even the European nationality. The West, being fully acquainted with the scenario, always welcomes this sort of former Muslims with talent to criticize Islam as M. Shāhid 'Ālam remarks:

The US needs a few 'good' Muslims to persuade the 'bad' ones to reform their religion, to learn to appreciate the inestimable benefits of Pax America and Pax Israelica.¹⁴

West provides them political protection, funds and forums on electronic and print media as well to express their anti-Islamic ideologies to fuel the war against terrorism and, in the words of Edward Said: "to place Islam in an inferior position".¹⁵

At the zenith of colonialism when Orientalism was at peak, the Orientalists did not want any assistance from the 'Orient', the natives, to deform their culture and religion. The Orientalists regarded them lesser breeds and their knowledge as well; hence, the natives' opinions and views carried no weight. As a result, Orientalists wrote innumerable books condescending and denigrating the cultures and religions of the slighter classes.

But today the modern milieu shows a little change as the West is in pursuit of the uppity natives especially the Muslims to speak and mould the Muslims according to Orientalists' conception of Islam. Professor 'Ālam explains the reasons behind the requisition:

One reason for this is that with the death of the old colonialism, some natives have begun to talk for themselves.

A few are even talking back at the Orientalists raising all sorts of uncomfortable questions. This hasn't been good: and something had to be done about it. In the 1970s the West began to patronize 'natives' who were deft at putting down their own people. Was the West losing its confidence?¹⁶

Then there came the 'war against global terrorism' generating an immediate explosion in the marketplace for Orientalists of Muslim eon. The West was in dire need of Muslim Orientalists to sooth the opinions and views to legalize the wars on terror.

The West now required Muslims who would make a diagnosis of their own tribulations as the West wanted to see them--as the unavoidable failings of their religion and culture. The West now demanded Muslims who would range themselves against their own people--who would denounce the just struggles of their own people as moral aberrations, as symptoms of a sick society.¹⁷

Professor 'Ālam names these natives '*Native Orientalists*' who speak the language of Orientalists to attain the materialistic settlements from the West:

The demand for 'native' Orientalists was strong. The pay for such turncoats was good too. Soon a whole crop of native Orientalists arrived on the scene. They are some of the best loved natives in the West.¹⁸

However, Toby Lester calls these kinds of orients 'Islamic revisionists' as the Orientalists are annoyed for being called themselves Orientalists to escape from Edward Said's critical definition of Orientalism. Toby Lester writes:

Indeed, for more than a century there have been public figures in Islamic world who have attempted the revisionist study of the Koran and Islamic history.¹⁹

But according to our point of view the term *Native Orientalism* is the most suitable for them as there is much resemblance of propagation and mode of criticism between natives and the original Orientalists. The basic duties deployed to the native Orientalists

are to defend the Western policies either in academic or political localities and to generate allegations & doubts among the Muslims regarding their faith and basic sources of Islamic Jurisprudence. Their fundamental assignment is to mould the Muslims' beliefs according to Western approach and interpretation of Islam. In simple words, the target assigned to these 'native Orientalists' is to advance the original Orientalists theories and agendas through the Muslim loudspeakers. Hence, we may define Native Orientalism as:

*“Every Muslim or ex-Muslim who inflates, advocates and precedes theories and works of Orientalists, is a Native Orientalist, and what he or she does is Native Orientalism”.*²⁰

The definition will be justified as we deal with the work of Ibn Warrāq in the preceding pages. Ibn Warrāq is not the only native Orientalist; there is a team of the native Orientalists who are busy in war of criticism against Islam with a West's pat at their backside. They are armed with misinformation and lies to achieve the false goals of false desires. Some of the well-known native Orientalists and their activities are given below:

Amir Tāheri

Amir Tāheri (b. 1942) is of Iranian origin conservative journalist and author based in Europe. In his writings, the main focuses of his criticism are the Middle East affairs and Islamic ideology of Jihād which he wrongly quotes as Islamist terrorism.²¹

Salmān Rushdie

Ahmad Salmān Rushdie (b. 1947) is of Indian origin British novelist and essayist. He achieved world notice when he wrote his novel *Midnight's Children*, which won the Booker Prize in 1981. In 1988 he wrote a very antagonistic and hostile novel, *Satanic Verses* which upset the Muslims all over the world and consequently Rushdie faced death threats and death *fatwa* in February, 1989. Aftermath of issue of Danish Cartoon controversy, Rushdie issued a statement in 2006 against Islamic 'totalitarianism', along with other native Orientalists including Ibn Warrāq, Ayaan Hirsi 'Ali and Irshād Manji. They stated that the violence sparked by the

publication of cartoons satirizing the Prophet Muhammad shows the need to fight for secular values and freedom. The statement is published in Charlie Hebdo, one of several European papers to reprint the caricatures.²²

Nonie Darwish

Nonie Darwish (b. 1949) is an Egyptian-American human rights activist and founder of Arabs for Israel. She is the author of two books: *'Now They Call Me Infidel; Why I Renounced Jihad for America, Israel and the War on Terror'* and *'Cruel and Usual Punishment: The Terrifying Global Implications of Islamic Law'*. She criticizes Islam as an authoritarian ideology that is attempting to impose on the world the norms of 7th century culture of the Arabian Peninsula. She alleges that Islam is an evil force and culture that orders the killing of unbelievers. She accuses Islam and *Sharia* of forming a retrograde ideology that adds greatly to the world's stock of misery.²³

Magdi Allām

Magdi Cristiano Allām (b.1952) is of Egyptian origin Italian Journalist and political leader, noted for his criticism of Islam. He criticizes so-called Islamic Extremism and defends Judeo-Christian roots of Europe and the West, and his articles include the relations between Western culture and Islamic World.²⁴ Allām converted from Islam to Roman Catholicism during the Vatican's 2008 Easter vigil service presided over by Pope Benedict XVI. Allām is the writer of several books on the criticism of Islam including *Viva Israele* (Long Live Israel), *Diario dall'Islam* (A diary from Islam), *Bin Laden in Italia. Viaggio nell'Islam Radicale* (Bin Laden in Italy: A journey through radical Islam).²⁵

Wafā Sultān

Wafā Sultān (b.1958) is of Syrian origin American author and a notorious critic of Islam. She resides in Los Angeles, California and is now a US naturalized citizen. She gathered world notice for her participation in Middle East political debates and her essay on aftermath of 9/11/2001.

Irshād Manji

Irshād Manji (b. 1968) is a Canadian feminist, author and activist. She is a well known critic of Islam and Muslim societies. *The New York Times* has described her as “Osama bin Laden’s worst nightmare”.²⁶ Manji wrote a book titled ‘*The Trouble with Islam Today*’²⁷ which has been published in more than thirty languages. Irshād's documentary film, *Faith without Fear*, follows her journey to reconcile faith and freedom. Released in 2007, the film depicts the personal risks Manji has faced as a Muslim reformer. She criticizes Islam in Yemen, Europe and Northern America, as well as histories of Islamic critical thinking in Spain and elsewhere. She is openly a homosexual.

Ayaan Hirsi ‘Ali

Ayaayn Hirsi ‘Ali (b. 1969) is of Somali origin Dutch feminist activist, writer and critic of Islam. She is the daughter of a Somali scholar, politician, and revolutionary opposition leader Hirsi Magan Isse. She wrote *Mijn Vriheid*, translated as *Infidel*²⁸ in which she criticized the fundamental principles of Islam and its basic sources, the Qur’ān and Islamic societies.²⁹

She attracted the world notice for writing a screenplay for an anti-Islamic movie ‘*Submission*’ a film produced by Theo van Gogh, which criticized the treatment of women in Muslim society. The film features an actress that is provocatively dressed in a semi-transparent veil (*burqa/hijāb*) and has verses of the Qur’ān written on her skin. The release of the film ignited much disturbance; the controversy became violent when a Muslim, Mohammed Bouyeri murdered Van Gogh in 2004.

Ehsān Jāmi

Ehsan Jami (b. 1985) is a Dutch Politician of Iranian origin. From March 7, 2006 until November 6, 2007 he was member of the City Journal of *Leids chendam-Voorburg* on behalf of the Dutch Labor Party. From that date he continues to be a member of the city council as independent member ‘fraction Jami’. In 2007 he was one of the two founders of the Central Committee for Ex-Muslims. He

criticizes Islam, stating: "I don't wish to confront Islam itself. I only want to spread the message that Muslims should be allowed to leave Islam behind without being threatened"³⁰.

Shāker Al Nabulsi

Dr. Shāker Nabulsi is an American author and columnist of Jordanian descent. He is signatory of the St Petersburg Declaration and has authored numerous books and written widely cited articles on politics, religion, literature and the Arab world.

Ibn Warraq

Ibn Warrāq (b. 1946) is the pseudonym of an ex-Muslim and polemical author of Pakistani origin. Neither his full name nor his institutional affiliation, if any, is anywhere given. He now lives in the USA, where he works with the Institute for the Secularization of Islamic Society (ISIS). He publishes under the name of Ibn Warrāq to hide his identity. Not even his family knows that he has written his most polemic book '*Why I Am Not A Muslim*'.³¹

Ibn Warrāq's writings have appeared in The Wall Street Journal and The Guardian in London³² and he has addressed governmental bodies all over the world including the United Nations in Geneva.³³ Ibn Warrāq should pay gratitude to Paul Kurtz, owner of the secular-humanist publishing house Prometheus Books; he is able to live as an independent scholar for publishing his books and arranging a stipend from an anonymous donor for him.³⁴ His other books are included *The Origins of the Koran; Classic Essays on Islam's Holy Book* was published in 1998³⁵, *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*³⁶, *What the Koran Really Says: Language, Text, and Commentary*³⁷, *Which Koran?: Variants, Manuscripts, Linguistics*³⁸.

Their Anti-Islam Activities

In 2007 some of above mentioned native Orientalists, such as Ibn Warraq, Ayaan Hirsi 'Ali, Wafā Sultān and Irshād Manji participated in St. Petersburg Secular Islam Summit.³⁹ The group released the St Petersburg Declaration which urges world governments to reject *Sharia* law, fatwa courts, clerical rule and state-sanctioned

religion in all their forms, oppose all penalties for blasphemy and apostasy, which they believe to be in accordance with article 18 of the Universal Declaration Human Rights. Further they declared that: We call on the governments of the world to

- Reject Sharia law, fatwa courts, clerical rule, and state-sanctioned religion in all their forms; oppose all penalties for blasphemy and apostasy, in accordance with Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human rights;
- eliminate practices, such as female circumcision, honor killing, forced veiling, and forced marriage, that further the oppression of women;
- protect sexual and gender minorities from persecution and violence;
- reform sectarian education that teaches intolerance and bigotry towards non-Muslims;
- And foster an open public sphere in which all matters may be discussed without coercion or intimidation.
- Before any of us is a member of the Umma, the Body of Christ, or the Chosen People, we are all members of the community of conscience, the people who must choose for themselves.⁴⁰

It was endorsed by Ayaan Hirsi 'Ali, Magdi Allām, Mithal Al-Alusi, Shāker Al-Nabulsi, Nonie Darwish, Afshin Ellian, Tawfik Hamid, Shahriār Kabir, Hasan Mahmud, Wafā Sultan, 'Āmir Tāheri, Ibn Warrāq, Manda Zand Ervin, Banafsheh Zand-Bonazzi.⁴¹

In addition to above, their Statement of Principles is as under:

1. We share the ideals of a democratic society, and a secular state that does not endorse any religion, religious institution, or any religious dogma. The basis for its authority is in man-made law, not in religious doctrine or in divine revelation. In a theocracy of the type that Islamic fundamentalists wish to establish, sovereignty belongs to god, but in a democracy sovereignty belongs to the people. We therefore favor the firm separation of religion and state: without such a

separation there can be no freedom from tyranny, and such a separation is the sine qua non for a secular state.

2. We believe in the primacy of the rule of law: a common civil code under which all men and women have equal protection of their rights and freedoms.
3. We endorse the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants on Human Rights without qualification. We are particularly concerned to promote and protect the rights of women and those with minority beliefs: all should be equal before the law.
4. We are dedicated to combating fanaticism, intolerance, violent fundamentalism, and terrorism by showing the intellectual inadequacy of the fanatics' programs, the historical inaccuracy of their claims, the philosophical poverty of their arguments, and the totalitarian nature of their thought.
5. We defend the right of free inquiry, and the free expression of ideas. We therefore reserve the right to examine the historical foundations of Islam, and to explain the rise and fall of Islam by the normal mechanisms of human history⁴².

Above declaration and statement of principles reveal nothing but only obvious frauds. Who were never Muslims, are trotted out as experts on Islam, ostensibly providing the public with an insider's view of the reality of Islam. Further investigation reveals the falsity of their claims. *Islamophobia* seems to be big business on the way to being socially mainstream, yet time and time again we have seen these so-called Muslims exposed as frauds, so-called experts who cannot even get fundamental facts about Islam straight. The dangers of steeping outside the tradition of Islam in order to understand it are well-known, as it invariably leads to extremism of many types, but how are we really sure that anonymous people **claiming** to be former Muslims, displaying a serious lack of knowledge of Islam and scholarly credentials, were really ever Muslims?

End Notes

- ¹ Oxford English Dictionary, (London, 1971).
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- ⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, 1.
- ⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 2.
- ⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, 3.
- ⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 97.
- ⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 4.
- ⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, 4.
- ¹⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 100.
- ¹¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 61.
- ¹² A‘zamī, *Hoping to Reform, Revise Islam*, Impact International, Vol.30 (March 2000), 28.
- ¹³ Said, *Orientalism*, xii
- ¹⁴ M. Shāhid ‘Ālam, *The Native Orientalists: The Muslims America Loves*, accessed on 24.03.0, <http://www.Albalagh.net/currentaffairs/0091.shtml>.
- ¹⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 139.
- ¹⁶ ‘Ālam, *The Native Orientalists: The Muslims America Loves*.
- ¹⁷ ‘Ālam, *The Native Orientalists*.
- ¹⁸ ‘Ālam, *The Native Orientalists*.
- ¹⁹ Toby Lester, *What is the Koran?* Reprinted in Ibn Warrāq, *What the Koran Really Says*(New York: Prometheus Books,2002)123-24
- ²⁰ The definition is derived from Edward Said’s definition of *Orientalism*.
- ²¹ Amir Taheri, *The Spirit of Allah: Khomeini and Islamic Revolution* (Bethesda: Adler& Adler, 1986).
- ²² Caroline Wyatt, BBC NEWS dated 2-03-2006, accessed on 12-06-2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4763520.stm>.
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- ²⁴ Allām, Magdi, *Jihād in Italy. A Journey Through Radical Islam* (Til Aviv: Mondadori, 2002).
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- ²⁷ St. Martin's Griffin, 2005.
- ²⁸ Printed in English by Richard Minitier, Free Press, 2007.
- ²⁹ Ayaan Hirsi 'Ali, *Infidel* (Richard Minitier: Free Press, 2007).
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- ³¹ (New York :Prometheus Books, 1995).
- ³² Accessed on 3.04.2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2002/jan/12/books.guardianreview5>.
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- ³⁴ The Campus Enquirer.
- ³⁵ Prometheus Books, New York.
- ³⁶ New York: Prometheus Books, 2000.
- ³⁷ New York: Prometheus Books, 2002.
- ³⁸ New York: Prometheus Books, 2009.
- ³⁹ The spectator, 3 October 2007
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- ⁴¹ The St. Petersburg Declaration.
- ⁴² Center for Inquiry, accessed on 4-04-2009, <http://www.centerforinquiry.net/isis/about>.